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Then and Now

Thoughts suggested by Washington's Birthday

BY

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THEN AND NOW.

1797—1897.

What lack I yet?—Matthew XIX:20.

Almost exactly one hundred years ago, that is, in its issue of February 13, 1797, the BOSTON GAZETTE, then perhaps the leading journal of New England, spoke thus through one of its correspondents, in reference to President George Washington, whose second term as chief executive was soon about to expire:

"We assure the President in the name of the people that he is highly respected as a private man. In that capacity he is an ornament to the land, but of his political career this cannot be said." Another writer in the AURORA declared that Washington, after bringing the country to the brink of ruin, fled from the gathering storm, while a third stated that when Washington was exalted to the Presidency America was a happy land, but by his means she had become most miserable.

These criticisms? A few isolated examples show us that even at that time there were some men here and there, who could not take a large view; who were blinded by prejudice to the best interests of their country. Such criticisms were called forth because Washington, knowing the enfeebled condition of the United States, knowing too that of all things peace with England was most needed, took the deliberate step of bringing about a peace treaty with Great Britain which, while disadvantageous in many respects to the newly formed American Union, did

nevertheless secure for it certain rights and gave international standing and character to Americans abroad.

That the treaty was one-sided Washington at the time admitted, and so too did most of his counsellors, but when it was made nothing better could be exacted from the haughty British government. It was either that or a chronic state of guerrilla warfare. Loving peacemore than war, the President threw the weight of his influence on the side of ratification and the Senate, composed as it was of high-minded and patriotic citizens promptly complied with the executive's known wishes. Although here and there some selfish grumbling was heard yet the mass of people were in accord with their chief and hence the articles of agreement were honorably and patriotically carried out.

We who have come a century later can well pause today to pay respect to that generation which exemplified so well the right attitude of citizenship and especially pay honor to him who rather than fail in giving his country peace, was willing, if needs be, to sacrifice his own personal popularity. The wisdom shown by the Senate in ratifying the British treaty is now most apparent. It gave to the fifteen confederated states what they most needed, a sense of security and a national consciousness, and it may be truly said that from '97 we may date our era of domestic development, an era perhaps the most glorious that any nation has ever entered upon.

A century has passed and another treaty with Great Britain is now before the United States Senate. This time there is nothing unequal about its terms. With a fair mindedness truly remarkable England holds out the hand of peace saying in effect to her American sister, "Come let us cease from even the fear of wars, let us set up a high court of arbitration and settle our differences hereafter not as barbarians, but as Christians."

Imagine with what joy such an offer would have been received in 1797; with what readiness people, Senate, President, would have acquiesced in its impartial conditions. Was peace more essential then than now? Did the people living in Washington's time need the sense of security more than do we? As society has grown in complexity, as commercial relations have developed and become more universal, is not peace—yes even the confidence that wars shall be no more—of greater value than ever before? How then does it happen that people, Senate, President, in 1897—if filled with the same spirit of patriotism as was exhibited by their forefathers—do not eagerly ratify and make a fact this treaty of arbitration?

But are we as patriotic, as unselfish, now as then? Do our legislators study the best interests of the whole country rather than their own personal interests? Are they animated with such high motives as we have a right to expect?

Says a recent student of public affairs, in this connection:

"One of the most significant changes in the past fifty years is in the decline of our Legislature and our Senate. The decline of our Legislature is not a mere decline in manners, but as well in the quality of the members, in education, social position, in morality, in public spirit, in care and deliberation, and, I must add, in integrity. Legislation is now more hasty and is drafted with much greater indifference to instructed and thoughtful public opinion."

It must be acknowledged that as we look over the composition of our highest national legislative body—as we compare it in 1897 with what it was in its palmy days when such men as Webster, Clay and Calhoun were its ornaments, we have only too much reason to believe the opinion expressed true.

And yet the men who occupy seats in the Senate chamber, drawn as they are from every part of our land, cannot surely represent some one set, or class, or body. How comes it then that there is this lowering of tone and purpose?

Why, in the last ten years, has there grown, in the minds of our best citizens, a want of confidence in the sincerity, the integrity and the patriotism of our U. S. Senators which is truly lamentable?

Whatever the reason, it must be a widespread one as true of Dakota as New York, and applicable to Texas as well as Oregon.

That brings us to a consideration of the development which has taken place since 1797, and as what has been going on in the newer West, that is, in California, Montana, and Dakota in the past dozen years so exactly typifies what, in the period just before the civil war went on in Kansas, Iowa, and Illinois, and what in the early part of th ecentury was the condition of the now well established states of Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky, it will not be amiss for us to generalize from what is now going on to what has been going on, from the part to the whole.

Take then, for example, a new Western town. The first thing it strives to do is to take on all the forms and physical comforts of an older place. A town in Colorado or Nebraska may not have 5000 people, yet it wants some prominent railroad to pass through it; it wants the telegraph, the telephone, a daily newspaper, electric lights, sidewalks, good hotels, gas and waterworks, manufacturing establishments, fine business blocks and other adjuncts to civilization. These things people want at once and they naturally set themselves to obtain them. Life in the newer communities is hard at first, plenty of physical work must be done, and little comfort can be enjoyed. What does a man in a pioneer village want with a landscape of Corots or an etching by Hamilton? He wants money, for that will give him boards for the house he is constructing, clothes for his children. Money is naturally the first thing sought, as money means physical ease and leisure, opportunity to do what one ikes, hence money becomes more highly prized than anything else and the community soon drifts into a certain

worldliness which counts that good where wealth is obtained that next to useless where the direct benefit is not money but increase of character or taste. At first the money passion works beneficently. It develops the mines, drains marsh lands, clears the forest, irrigates the plains, and makes for the betterment of physical conditions. When we look merely at the external side of things and judge progress by material improvement then we have, as a people, great cause to rejoice at our unprecedented national expansion, our marvellous industrial and mechanical development. But is not the statement "man does not live by bread alone" equally true today as it was when uttered 1900 years ago?

Is there not some other kind of progress besides this material progress which is equally valuable?

While men and women are fervently engaged in scrambling to obtain wealth and the various adjuncts which go to give social position and station to their owners, what becomes of the larger duties to the city, the state, and to society which call for the highest kind of unselfishness?

More than once have I heard the statement made "I haven't time to meddle with politics."

This in so many places being the prevailing sentiment is it any wonder that there has grown up in the West and in the East too for that matter a certain class of men who see in this indifference to public duties their opportunity?

Germans, Scandinavians, Irish, Italians. This is the raw material out of which American citizens must be made in most of our Western states.

The political manipulator knowing that these foreigners have, as yet, no intelligent opinions in regard to government, knowing too that as a rule they value but little the right of franchise, obtains from them by petty bribes and rewards their allegiance and is able to hand over their full vote to any man, clique or party willing to pay sufficiently for the same.

Thus has there arisen a new power in the land, unknown in 1797, vulgarly termed a political boss. The people being busy, as I said before, are not willing to go to the trouble of voting, at least they do not go in any numbers to the primaries. These nominating conventions, therefore, fall almost completely into the hands of the political manager. His influence being paramount, it is self evident that the men nominated to our state legislatures are largely such men as are his friends, such as he can control. It has therefore come about that few of the members are really chosen by the people. They are suggested and returned by the machine manager of the state or district.

Look around you. See the spectacle presented in Delaaware, in New York, in Illinois, over the choice of United States Senator. Does anyone think that mere chance, or merit kept the president of a powerful California railroad in the Senate term after term? Does anyone think it mere merit that sends a man living in New York city to the Senate to represent so great a state as Ohio? Now we can understand what Herbert Spencer means when he says, "You retain the forms of freedom, but there is a loss of the real thing. It is true that those who rule you do not do so by means of retainers armed with swords, but they do it through regiments of men armed with voting papers who obey the word of command most loyally, and thus enable the leaders to override the will of the people."

Every year the matter is growing more serious, for every year society is growing more complicated. As commerce increases, credit expands and interests multiply. Our machinery of government is increasing in delicacy, therefore derangement is becoming easier and repair more difficult.

Now the question is one which touches every citizen. Your interests, mine, are all bound up in it. For the past four years we have all felt the effect of instability in taxation, crude experiments with the tariff, unwise and inflammatory

speeches against England, against Spain, against the Ottoman empire. Foolish adventures in foreign policy disturb foreign trade. Absurd financial theories expounded in Congress shake confidence in investments. The lack of wise and definite statesmanship, such as is shown in the present handling of the Arbitration treaty make patriotic and thoughtful men feel anxious as to our future, and no mere pointing to our material prosperity, no mere summing up of what we have done in developing the country and building cities will hide the fact that politically, as a nation, we are sailing into dangerous seas.

What is the remedy? for all my discourse thus far has had that single question in mind. Is there any one thing which can be suggested as a panacea? Will some change in form, method of voting, some transformation in outward conditions right us and bring the ship of state back again upon its true course?

I do not think so. We are too prone to put our reliance in forms, institutions, ways and methods, instead of in the integrity of the heart and the unselfish action of the hand.

There was a time—I am not sure that we have passed out from it—when it was said that universal education is the panacea for our political ills. "Establish public schools, endow academies and colleges, enlighten men's minds, and we shall enter upon an era of intelligence when the citizen cannot be duped by political tricksters, or led into crime by those who are now sharper and shrewder than he." So it was asserted.

But in giving education to all, do we not at the same time put into the hands of men the power to commit crimes which otherwise they might be unable to commit? Must not a man have the rudiments of an education before he can lead others astray politically and become the manager of an

assembly or ward district? Education then alone will not suffice. Something more, something deeper, which changes the heart and the disposition, is essential. I repeat, we are better off today, in almost every way, than were our grandparents; our homes are better built, we have more comforts, greater variety of food, cheaper and better methods of transportation, we can more easily obtain warmth, light, clothing, books, amusement, but will anyone say that we have advanced proportionally in integrity, disinterestedness, patriotism, sterling worth? In short has character grown along with material development? Can one see on every side men of such stature as Washington, Adams, Hancock, Franklin?

We need then above all things a power in our land which shall somehow fill men's hearts and minds with a far other passion than that of mere worldly success. The evils of today can be cured only by the religious sentiment and therefore of paramount usefulness to any community, if rightly conducted, is the Church of God.

I say this in no perfunctory spirit for I would talk to you this morning not so much as a preacher, but as a man.

In looking over our whole land it seems to me the crying need is for an increase in worth. Universities and seats of learning are excellent; so too public libraries, and I am glad to see their rapid growth in every state. I rejoice as well in our city hospitals, in all the instrumentalities which go for the right development of body and mind. At the same time I know that something more is needed. As a nation our ideals are not high. We do not insist on conscientious ness, reverence, on absolute commercial integrity, on public spirit, on unselfish patriotism. These qualities are not those we see developing as they should in our youth.

What then of the future?

The Church, if rightly conducted, is the most essential factor in American society. It calls men's attention away

from purely material things. It gives them other and higher aims than merely money making ones. It constantly holds before them the ideal of the cross and shows that only through sacrifice is glory obtained. It would make society pure, honest, noble, fearless. It says a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things possessed, and imperatively enjoins each to seek first righteousness.

Thus does the church strengthen individual character and ultimately our whole national character.

I cannot understand how it is that from the point of view of our country's best welfare, wealthy people will give in so princely a way to found chairs of oriental languages, to establish libraries, to endow industrial schools, to build art museums, and give in so beggarly a way to church work. If the question came to me, which would you rather do, establish in Butte, Cripple Creek, in Reno, in Leadville, Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches, or public libraries and art museums, I should answer unhesitatingly, by all means build the churches.

Fathers! mothers! You who have had experience in the world, I especially address my words to you.

Before an evil can be corrected it must first be seen plainly and in all its dreadfulness.

I have tried to show you plainly this morning how by the inevitable conditions under which we, here in America, have been placed, our thoughts have turned naturally, necessarily, first of all to material things, to the building up of a higher civilization.

This compulsion under which we have labored by virtue of our new and uncultivated land has come to make us appreciate and emphasize material things and their symbol—money, more than spiritual things and their manifestation—character. Thus slowly has there come about a decadence of moral fibre which on the civic side manifests itself in a disregard of public and political duties. Out from this care-

lessness there has grown certain state and national evils which are to be noted in the lower moral tone of our legislative bodies. A decline in patriotism and integrity is showing itself in rampant legislative selfishness, in the prominence given to special bills for private ends and by a base ignoring of the things that are best for the whole land. This political evil, if it continues to grow, threatens to divest the individual citizen of his free franchise, to interrupt his business and to play sad havoc with our national institutions.

No one single thing can be suggested as a remedy except to develop and deepen personal character to train the coming generations and give them other purposes and other ideals than sordid and pleasureable ones. The church stands first, foremost and forever, to do exactly that kind of work hence the church should receive your full, hearty and enthusiastic allegiance and support.

"What lack I yet?" In imagination I can see this fair land standing like a rich youth before the master and with proud self-confidence reciting its virtues. "Here all men may know religious liberty. . . . Here there is peace and prosperity; here is universal education, here sovereignty for every man," and so the list continues through all the fundamental requirements. What lack I yet?

And I can see the master looking with a pleased favor upon this young America, so full of promise, so admirable, so strong, so noble. "What lack I yet?" "Yet one thing more, if thou wouldst be perfect, turn thou from wealth and follow me."

Will the heart of the young nation respond? Will it indeed turn to the unseen, to the Christlike life, as to the only enduring riches? If so it shall know life, eternal life. The answer rests with you, with me, with every man and woman claiming American citizenship.

Pray God that we each may help to answer that question aright.

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